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# Guiding Principles

For promising partnership practices
in education in emergencies

Partnerships in
Education in Emergencies

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The ideas expressed are those of the authors.

For more about the research informing this brief:
eiepartnerships.org

## Why the need for guiding principles on partnerships in EiE?

Historically, humanitarian organizations worked alone, siloed from one another. However, in recent years, humanitarian action has increasingly embraced notions of inter-agency collaboration. Through this cooperative environment, humanitarian actors seek to enable greater coordination between agencies in order to avoid duplication and competition. Moreover, in addition to traditional actors—such as UN agencies, multilateral banks, bilateral donors, and non-governmental organizations—the private sector, including businesses and foundations, has increasingly engaged in humanitarian response.

**Humanitarianism looks increasingly like a system that encompasses a wide network of global, national, and localized actors and organizations working in partnership.**

Humanitarian action also now prioritizes a "localization agenda" where actors and communities affected by crisis— or "beneficiaries"—are meant to engage in and inform crisis response at every step of the process. Humanitarianism, including policy-making, funding, and implementation, now rarely involves merely one or two agencies, but instead looks increasingly like a system that encompasses a wide network of global, national, and localized actors and organizations working in partnership.

The education in emergencies (EiE) arena reflects this wider shift to a humanitarian network. As the Inter-Agency Network on Education in Emergencies (INEE) notes in its Minimum Standards, organizations ought to prioritize collaboration in order to achieve educational goals for students affected by crisis.

Despite a surge in educational partnerships, the EiE community has yet to develop guiding principles on how organizations might approach partnerships so that they result in effective and ethical practices, leading to improvements for students in crisis settings. This policy brief aims to address this gap by proposing five intersecting guiding principles for promising partnership practices in EiE.

# EVIDENCE INFORMING
## THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The five guiding principles for promising partnership practices derive from a study that sought to generate evidence on the nature and impact of partnerships in EiE, using the global educational response to the Syria refugee crisis in Lebanon as a case study. The study aimed to understand: the interaction, relationships, and proliferation of actors over time; the characteristics of their partnerships; the impact of these partnerships on coordination and community participation mechanisms that promote the engagement of localized actors; and the impact of partnership practices on student retention, progression, and integration into local communities via education.

To achieve these goals, we conducted a three-year (2018-2021) vertical case study, including an analysis of over 100 interviews, 250 documents, a network analysis of 440 different organizations, and over 30 site visits and observations of partnership activities. These data, moreover, were collected during

Interaction, relationships, & proliferation of actors over time

Characteristics of partnerships

Impact on promoting engagement of localized actors

Potential impact on student retention, progression, and integration

a period that saw multiple crises within Lebanon and globally, including political and economic crises, the COVID-19 pandemic, and a devastating explosion in Beirut port. The study also coincided with a global reckoning on racism spurred by an intensification of Black Lives Matter protests. From a longitudinal analysis of these data contextualized in these events, we arrived at five guiding principles for promising partnership practices.

# GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The five principles offered here do not merely provide guidance, but demand a shift in orientation away from traditional or more commonplace thinking and action in education in emergencies. We describe them as "promising" because they emerge from the practices of successful partnerships that withstood multiple compounding crises. Yet each partnership develops and operates in a different context and partnership outcomes, including how they are experienced, depend on a range of factors.
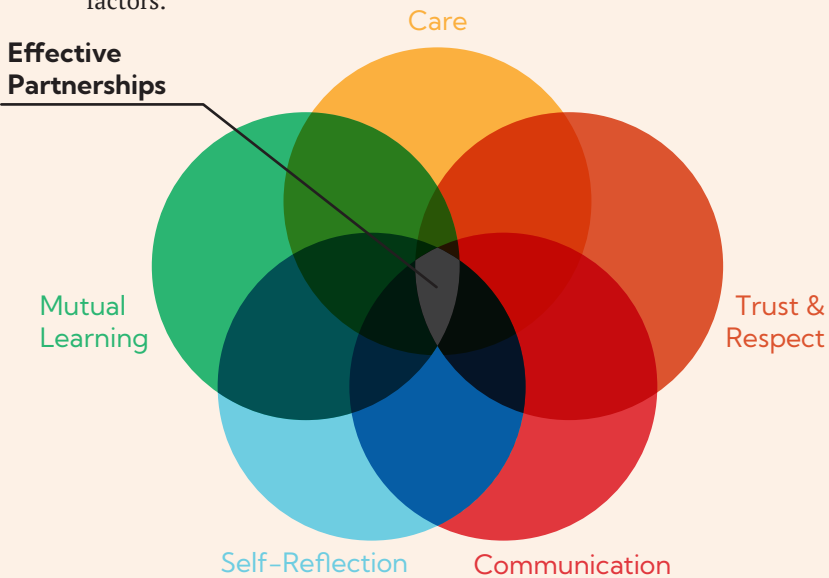


Although other principles and practices might improve outcomes in education in emergencies, we view these five as critical for partnerships to function effectively and ethically, as each relates to how people interact and collaborate with one another. The five principles intersect and are equally important. And although drawn from EiE partnerships focusing on Syria refugee education, we propose these principles as applicable to other crisis contexts, as foundational for approaching partnerships in an array of settings and in response to various emergencies. We posit that anyone and any organization can be a good partner. Positive partnerships rest on how people and organizations approach their work and their partners, how they operate, and how they embrace change. Anyone can adopt the five principles we outline here and improve their partnerships.

# CARE

## From saviorism to care

Our findings suggest that the principle of care contributes to positive, productive partnerships in EiE. By care we refer to the sometimes intangible ways in which partners interact and approach their activities while collaborating with one another as fellow humans rather than merely fellow humanitarians and/or education professionals. Care includes basic human behavior such as kindness and thoughtfulness, as well as empathy for one another's circumstances. Care also derives from a degree of vulnerability, through which partners come to know one another's struggles and strengths, both professionally and personally. Care allows partners to truly grasp one another's needs, including for flexibility and understanding.

When partners care for one another, they more regularly and organically communicate, which in turn allows for greater understanding of challenges and enables coordinated activity. Care often leads partnerships to embrace participatory practices through which all partners contribute to project activities and outcomes— because partners who care for one another desire each other's input and participation. Care, which fosters empathy, reduces the risk of discrimination among partners and spurs self-reflection on the part of all. Finally, our analysis shows that care helps to sustain partnerships through crisis.

More traditional or commonplace approaches to EiE often derive from a place of benevolence or charity. While these might be considered positive attitudes, they risk embodying saviorism, where partners who perceive themselves to be in a more privileged position act as though the other partner requires rescuing. Such motivations and positionalities focus more on those providing aid and assistance (often from privileged communities and the Global North), in a one-directional sense, rather than a focus on local partners as people, with challenges and struggles, but also agency, knowledge, ingenuity, and capabilities. Care is multi-directional; all partners must care about the wellbeing of all others.

# TRUST & RESPECT

## Shift from a culture of monitoring and outputs to a culture of trust and respect

The related principles of trust and respect together contribute to partnership success in EiE. The two go hand-in-hand; each depends on the other. Respect includes recognition that all partners hold strengths and capacities to conduct their work, and although these capacities may differ from partner to partner, each must be considered valuable and necessary.

Trust allows partners to take a hands-off approach to one another's work, allowing the other the flexibility and adaptability they might need. Respect recognizes that partners will make good choices based on their own experiences, skills, and knowledge of contexts. Respect also leads partners to recognize each other as creative, capable, and resilient, able to cope under pressure. Trust and respect align closely with principle #4, in leading to genuine mutual learning.

Although shared goals and values are often mentioned by partners as important, in practice these do not appear to be pivotal factors in successful partnerships. In fact, assuming that partners ought to share values and goals may be problematic. For instance, in those partnerships characterized by historic power asymmetries, dominant actors tend to dictate what values and goals are important. Instead, our findings suggest that partners ought to respect one another's values and goals, even in the case that they differ.

When partners trust and respect one another, they communicate well, embrace full and active participation of one another, recognize inequities, and act to remedy these. Such partnerships avoid an approach that emphasizes efficiency and dictates top-down, output-driven projects, via reductive micro-management and constant monitoring of data.

# ONGOING & ORGANIC
# COMMUNICATION

## From coordination to communication

Coordination—one of the foundational INEE Minimum Standards and a widely agreed-upon factor in effective EiE programming—is touted as a means to achieving efficiency in partnerships, leading to less duplication, more complementarity, and successful outcomes. However, through our analysis, we uncovered how different partners interpret and enact coordination in different ways depending on context.

When asked about coordination, actors in Lebanon discussed how partners communicate, and how ongoing and organic communication led to stronger partnerships. Through genuine, oftentimes unscheduled communication through various means—be it virtual, over phone, messaging apps, email, or in-person—partners come to better know each another, understand each other's goals and ways of working, and trust one another. Coordination in fact depends upon communication, and communication leads to additional positive outcomes, such as knowledge sharing, transparency, care, trust and respect. Through ongoing and organic communication, other valuable practices naturally follow. In this way, communication can foster more meaningful relationships, while reducing a competitive environment.

Partnerships are evolving and dynamic, and often must withstand unexpected obstacles. With strong communication already in place, partnerships are more likely to sustain over longer periods. This continuity in communication plays a key role in helping partnerships withstand crisis.

The concept of "coordination" aligns primarily with a Northern-based discourse. While coordination and its contributions to effectively delivering aid and other services to those affected by crises is important, in considering how partnerships operate, ongoing and organic communication is key.

# MUTUAL LEARNING
## & MULTI–DIRECTIONAL KNOWLEDGE SHARING

## From capacity building to mutual learning

Our study highlighted several partnership activities, at global and local levels, that demonstrated the ways in which partners effectively share knowledge and learn from one another. This sharing and learning is multi-directional—in particular, between different types of organizations which occupy different roles, and regardless of resources, size, and location. For instance, partnerships that embrace mutual learning occur when those from the Global North position themselves as learners, as opposed to those who "build capacity" in the Global South.

When mutual learning takes place, local knowledge is deemed as significant—if not more so due to deep contextual understanding— as knowledge produced in the Global North. No individual ought to be labelled "the expert" and partnership spaces should foster new ways of thinking and operating, allowing for greater participatory practices. As well, partnerships benefit from internal organizational learning, where

each organization has the time to share knowledge with and learn from their colleagues.

Mutual learning and knowledge sharing is sometimes scheduled and structured, but more often appears to be organic, fostered through communication, on the basis of trust and respect for one another's intelligence, experience, and capacities. This form of organic and multi-directional learning may not fit cleanly into the more commonplace output-driven and efficiency-oriented culture of the humanitarian industry.

The term "capacity building" has pervaded the development and humanitarian sectors, but our findings suggest that this one-directional (and paternalistic) concept does not capture how effective partnerships operate.

# SELF-REFLECTION & INTERROGATION OF POWER DYNAMICS

## From power imbalances to self-reflection through awareness & interrogation

Our vertical analysis, at each level and through each set of data, revealed that power imbalances pervade partnerships in EiE. In particular, actors from the Global North and organizations with resources hold positions of power. Power dynamics reflect structural, systemic, and direct forms of inequities, sometimes economic, often racialized, and colonial. Power asymmetries also emerge between racial and ethnic groups, for instance as xenophobia against refugee communities.

Humanitarian organizations often cite the goal of achieving "equitable partnerships." We recognize this aim as attainable in the long-term. But gaining true equity would require massive structural changes and a widespread anti-colonial shift in the international development and humanitarian industries.

Our analysis suggests that a first step towards ameliorating power imbalances involves acknowledging who embodies positions of power and why, and how this power relates to colonialism, capitalism, and racism. Interrogating power dynamics can be pre-organized, through workshops, readings, and other scheduled activities, but more importantly involves sometimes uncomfortable self-reflection on the part of individuals. Only when some people become open to relinquishing positions of power can asymmetries shift. And as we uncovered, the long process of addressing power dynamics must be ongoing, embedded into everyday approaches to activities and interactions, and this process will likely go unfinished even after a partnership has completed its work.

Our study suggests that some partnerships might never achieve true equity—in particular, when resources and funding come into play, inequities might remain entrenched. But meaningful partnerships which result in positive outcomes, based on care, trust, respect, and mutual learning—can be achieved when everyone involved moves toward awareness of structural power asymmetries.

# A Transformation in EiE Partnership Practices

Each of the five guiding principles involves a shift, which suggests the need for a more overarching transformation in traditional ways of operating in the humanitarian sector.

Not only must actors change practices, self-perceptions, and approaches, but humanitarians must be open to dismantling ways of operating, including but not limited to partnerships.

| Saviorism | Care |
| Culture of monitoring & outputs | Culture of trust & respect |
| Coordination | Communication |
| Capacity building | Mutual learning |
| Power imbalances | Self-reflection |

In order to achieve permanent, structural change in humanitarian action, the industry—including aid mechanisms, policy development, advocacy, program development, and project implementation—must adopt an explicit anti-colonial and participatory mandate.

But although structural change must occur in order to facilitate and make permanent major shifts in humanitarianism, we propose that individuals and organizations can begin to spur such transformation through changing their own practices and beliefs.

Through pursuing the five partnership principles—care; trust and respect; ongoing and organic communication; mutual learning and multi-directional knowledge sharing; and self-reflection and interrogation of power dynamics—meaningful and positive partnerships can result. And in turn will better support education in emergencies.

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